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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the development of the community college system in American higher education, describes the impact of the various reform movements of the twentieth century on community colleges, and discusses the current and future issues that two-year colleges face. These topics are discussed in relation to California's community colleges, with special attention given to conclusions drawn by Kevin Dougherty in his study of 34 community colleges. A historical outline traces the development of the community college from its first established campus in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois, to the present, with California holding the single largest community college system, which includes 107 colleges serving over 1.3 million students, and is, in fact, the largest system of higher education in the nation. Discussed next is the educational reform era of the 1980s, the development of change out of earlier movements, and issues specific to community colleges, including concern with equity, access, and providing business with an educated and skilled workforce. Finally, a section on the future of the curriculum covers issues of access, accountability, systematic change, funding, and governance and administration. Contains 10 references. (AS)

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Reconceptualizing Schools and Learning: The California Community Colleges

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RECONCEPTUALIZING SCHOOLS AND LEARNING: THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The purposes of this paper are to outline the development of the community college system in American higher education, to describe the impact of the various reform movements of the twentieth century on community colleges, and finally, to discuss the current and future issues which face community colleges. These topics are discussed in relation to California community colleges. Special attention is given to the conclusions drawn by Kevin Dougherty in his study of 34 community colleges, *The Contradictory College: The Conflicting Origins, Impacts, and Futures of the Community College*.

HISTORY

The first community college was established in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois. The impetus for founding the college in Joliet was the superintendent of the local high school district, J. Stanley Brown. He had been influenced by the "vigorous advocacy" of the junior college by William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago. Joliet was conceived as the "postgraduate department" of the high school. The students were intended to be recent high school graduates and the faculty were drawn from the high schools (Dougherty, 1994, p. 127). In 1902, the local board of education officially recognized the college and decided that high school graduates could pursue their studies at Joliet at no extra charge. Thus, the tradition of comparatively low tuition at community colleges was established, though not by student demand

but by government decision (Fretwell in Dougherty, 1994, p. 128). In 1912, a junior college committee of teachers was formed and in 1937, the term "junior college" replaced the term "postgraduate education". In Joliet, the community college remained part of the high school system until the 1960s.

Also cited as an influence on the development of the community colleges was the experience of the General College of the University of Minnesota, which embraced the assumptions and ideas of the progressive movement. University educators suggested that general education was as appropriate for the less gifted as it was for the superior student. The General College experiment, which was a two-year undergraduate program, influenced the more innovative curricula of the numerous community colleges that were to spring up throughout the country (Dougherty, 1994, p. 114).

The second community college was established in 1910 in Fresno, California. Like Joliet, it was championed by the local high school superintendent and was established as a department of the high school. The California community college system grew more rapidly than others. By 1919, there were 21 community colleges in California. Dougherty (1994) identifies two major ways in which community colleges were founded: circumscribed initiation and popular mobilization. "Circumscribed initiation" describes the process by which the earliest community colleges were founded. Local school administrators or school board members would promote the concept and gain the approval of the local board of trustees. The college was part of the high school system. It was "a very self-contained process," with little or no involvement with outside groups (Dougherty, 1994, p. 119).

"Popular mobilization" was the second way in which community colleges were founded. As the number of community colleges began to expand, states took a more active interest in their

development, in part because of a concern over their rapid development and the impact they would have on state resources. To control their development, states began to require approval through the referendum process as well as approval by state agencies. Although local school administrators continued to be the principal proponents, school board members and business people were increasingly more involved (Dougherty, 1994, p. 119).

Of all the stakeholders – students, parents, local school administrators, business people, and politicians – Dougherty identifies school administrators as the "master builders" of the community college at the local level, involved in 83% of the foundings of the 34 community colleges Dougherty used for his study (Dougherty, 1994, p. 136). There were several reasons for their level of involvement, including increased educational opportunity for students and the ability to meet the training needs of the business community. Less altruistic reasons were because a community college enhanced the professional standing of local school administrators and provided career opportunities beyond the high school level.

Other entities which supported the development of community colleges were state governments and state universities. In 1907, California established a process by which local governments could found community colleges under certain conditions. Other states followed suit, but much later. A state process eventually led to state aid. Indirect aid was initiated in California in 1917 and direct aid in 1921. In the 1920's, state aid accounted for 5% of community college funding. It increased to 30% in the 1950s and by 1989-90, state aid would account for 49% of the funding to community colleges (Dougherty, 1994, p. 145). In 1961, California recognized the community colleges as part of the state's higher education system. Predictably , the establishment of whole systems of state community colleges followed, often headed by state governing boards which headed but did not directly administer the colleges in

the system. Illinois established its system in 1965 and California and Washington in 1967. The federal government also provided support for community colleges.. By 1978-79, federal aid equaled $463 million or 7.3% of all current income received by the community colleges (Dougherty, 1994, p. 175).

As mentioned above, state university systems usually supported the establishment of community colleges. However, their support was often the result of a keen self-interest in protecting their exclusivity. Clark Kerr, former president of the University of California, wrote in a 1973 report published by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education:

> "Elite" institutions of all types – colleges and universities – should be protected and encouraged as a source of scholarship and leadership training at the higher levels. They should not be homogenized in the name of egalitarianism. . . . they should be protected by policies on differentiation of functions. (Dougherty, 1994, p. 154)

The California Master Plan, shaped by Kerr, is an example of how community colleges were used to protect the selectivity of the elite state universities. The influence of the state universities was important. In California, for example, they advocated for capital aid to community colleges in the late 1950s and supported the 1963 Master Plan which identified community colleges as the principal means of access to college. But as Dougherty (1994) observes, their inaction was as important as their action. California state universities did not pursue the development of community colleges as branches of the university system because there was not the fear of competition between the segments of higher education in California that existed in other state systems, notably Indiana. However, the state universities did have fears which they believed the establishment of a separate community college system would alleviate. One was the concern that including the community college function in the state university system would siphon away limited resources. Another was the fear of overcrowding, which would in

turn affect the state universities' ability to remain selective. As long as community colleges were limited to offering the associate's degree, they would not be competing with the state universities. Explains Kerr:

> When I was guiding the development of the Master Plan for Higher Education in California in 1959 and 1960, I considered the vast expansion of the community colleges to be the first line of defense for the University of California as an institution of international academic renown. Otherwise the university was going to be overwhelmed by large numbers of students with lower academic attainments or attacked as trying to hold on to a monopoly over entry into higher status. (Dougherty, 1994, p. 160)

The common perception of the driving forces behind the rapid expansion of the community college system is that parents, students and business people clamored for more access to higher education and administrators and boards responded because they, too, believed in the need for greater access to education to both promote equity and to ensure a trained workforce. While this was certainly true to various degrees in different regions of the country, Dougherty (1994) asserts that none of these influences was the primary driving force. Rather, he argues persuasively that the self-interest of government officials at many levels was the real reason for the rapid expansion of community colleges, especially after the late 1950s.

According to Dougherty, there is no other reason to explain the rapid growth. Local school officials and boards saw the founding of a community college as an enhancement to their professional and community standing, as well as an opportunity for increased professional opportunities. State offices of education benefited in similar ways. State university officials protected the selectivity of their institutions and found a "safety valve" for burgeoning student enrollment. Local and state politicians mined political support from the business community, as well as the general public, for their efforts in gaining colleges for their communities. Finally, state officials discovered that the expansion of community colleges was not going to drain state

budgets. In fact, community colleges were cheaper to run than state universities , were more attractive to business investors, and strengthened voter support (Dougherty, 1994, pp. 168, 184).

It is paradoxical, then, that this self interest would prove to actually enhance the relatively minor role of the other constituents: parents, students, and business people. As Dougherty explains, "the solution to this paradox lies in the dual nature of government official's interests and values: they are a source of constraint as well as autonomy" (Dougherty, 1994, p. 184). That is, state officials need to leverage resources from business and to get that leverage, they must make concessions to business, one of those being provision of a skilled workforce. This argument is one Dougherty terms "state relative autonomy" and believes is the best explanation for the development of community colleges. In short, government officials have shaped the community college in a situation of relative autonomy from the desires of private interest groups (Dougherty, 1994, pp. 125-6).

Whether or not Dougherty's argument is correct, the fact remains that the community colleges, unique in American higher education, experienced rapid growth in the 1920s and 1930s, and again the 1960s. The colleges offered occupational studies and diversified college missions even further. They were originally designed to provide academic foundations for students planning to transfer to four-year institutions, but began to provide short-term and long-term vocational training. Equally important, community colleges also defined service to their communities as part of their mission (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 49).

The 1960s was the most dynamic period of growth for community colleges with a college opening at the rate of one per week (Vaughn in Fox, 1989, p. 3). There were several events which supported this growth. First was the passage of the Higher Education Facilities Act in 1963; 22% of Title I funds earmarked for undergraduate education went to community colleges

and public technical institutes. In 1963, the Vocational Education Act was approved and in 1965, Title III of the Higher Education Act (HEA) authorized grants for strengthening developing institutions. Twenty-two per cent of the funding for HEA was set aside for two -year colleges.

By 1970, there were nearly 1,100 community colleges serving 2.5 million students (Cohen, Palmer,& Zwemer in Fox, 1989, p. 3). However, the pace began to slow in the 1970s because of increasing fiscal stringency and the fact that the colleges were running out of new populations to serve. In the 1980s, growth nearly ceased, a trend which continued into the early 1990s and beyond as the nation slowly recovered from the most recent recession (Dougherty, 1994, p. 118). Even so, in 1992-93, community colleges accounted for 37% of all undergraduate enrollments and 46% of all public college enrollments and awarded 514,756 associate degrees (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 60). California has the single largest community college system, with 107 colleges serving over 1.3 million students, the largest system of higher education in the nation.

THE ERA OF REFORM: ISSUES FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

As a segment of higher education, the community colleges were not immune to the reform movements of the 1980s. Beginning in 1980-81 and continuing to the present is a sharp swing away from concerns about equity and access and toward concerns about quality, efficient use of resources, and broadened missions. The national elections of 1980 marked an abrupt shift from an almost exclusive focus on equity concerns to one emphasizing economic and political reform, including issues such as academic performance and institutional improvement. *A Nation At Risk*, a Reagan initiative, renounced pre-existing policies as leading to economic,

political, and social decline. Other similar reports were less dramatic but generally supported the need to raise educational standards, even though none was very specific about how this might be accomplished. Shortly thereafter, a similar series of reports began to appear that focused on higher education.

The 1980s saw an unprecedented revival of 1940's reforms as stakeholders became more concerned about quality. A plethora of reports was issued, the first wave of which was directed toward the public elementary and secondary systems and began with *A Nation at Risk*, sponsored by the National Commission on Excellence (1983). This was the first report to capture public attention because of its sweeping indictment of precollegiate education. A second wave of reports followed which targeted higher education and which was equally critical. These reports included *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* (Bennet, 1984), *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (National Institute of Education ,1984) *and Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community* (Association of American Colleges, 1984/5). The conclusions of these reports – all of which expressed a concern for quality – were the impetus for yet another shift in higher education toward a common core curriculum and against what was perceived to be excessive specialization promoted by overly autonomous academic departments to the detriment of liberal learning (Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

It is important to understand why these reports appeared when they did, just as it is important to understand who generated them. As noted above, their conclusions were reactions to several forces: the reforms made in the 1960s, the effects of declining resources in the 70s and 80s, and changing perceptions of key constituencies about the purpose of higher education. Whereas the 1960s and 1970s had been concerned with access of underrepresented

constituencies in academe, the 1980s could be characterized by concerns over quality, a characteristic response of academe to periods of "loosened" standards and increased diversity (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Another reason cited for the deterioration of the quality of the curriculum was the lack of leadership in education (Toombs, 1991).

As Dougherty observes, the origins of the community college were diverse and to some degree contradictory. On the one hand, the colleges' *raisons d'être* were to provide all adults with access to higher education, a reflection of the concern with equity and access, and to provide business with an educated and skilled workforce. On the other hand, the colleges were perceived as safety valves for an elite higher education system which did not want to jeopardize its exclusive status by trying to serve an exploding population of diverse and often underprepared students. Dougherty asserts that the real driving force behind their origin and rapid expansion was the self interest of government officials. It is these contradictory origins which Dougherty believes are the reason for the contradictory effects of community colleges and for what promises to be a period of significant transition as community colleges enter the twenty-first century.

FUTURE ISSUES: THE CURRICULUM

> It is perhaps most appropriate then to define our present stage…as one in which colleges and universities are pressed toward greater prescription in deference to strong and continuing external demands for both accountability and quality control. (Stark, 1997, p. 74)

One issue which emerged from the 1980s was another cycle of debate over general education vs. specjalization and the purpose of the community college curriculum. As noted

above, the community colleges began before 1910 but developed most rapidly after 1940. As a result of the job market, they offered occupational programs to an older and more diverse student population and there was a proliferation of career-oriented undergraduate majors. Thirty-four percent of community college students study arts and sciences. However 20% are enrolled in technical fields, 20% in business, and 25% in health and other trades (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, 53). Besides expanding occupational programs, community colleges also defined service to communities as part of their mission, thus diversifying college missions even further. As Stark (1997) notes, community colleges continue to be the largest and fastest growing single segment of higher education. They will continue to grow because technical support and related jobs, the most rapidly expanding occupational group, is expected to grow over 30% between 1988 and the year 2000 (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 61).

When community colleges were first begun, the intent was to facilitate enrollment in four-year institutions or at least to provide students with a core of general education courses in the liberal arts. However, "today, vocational education is the dominant program in the community college, enrolling between 40 and 60% of community college students (Dougherty, 1994, p. 191). The vocationalization of the community colleges has raised considerable debate. Was it the result of business and social demands for a trained workforce? Was it the result of the consumer-student's demand for skills and knowledge which led to a paying job? Or, as some have claimed, was it the result of a capitalist move to maintain the educational gap between the social classes? Finally, did community colleges vocationalize themselves in an effort to carve out a secure, if subordinate, market for themselves? In his in-depth study of this phenomenon, Dougherty claims that private interest groups had only limited influence, coming again to the conclusion that government officials acted autonomously and out of self interest but at the same

time, gave students and business a "back-door influence." Dougherty asserts that government officials at the local, state and federal levels encouraged vocationalization because it leveraged support from the business community, enhanced their institutions' reputations in light of those students who did not continue to a baccalaureate degree, and garnered political support (Dougherty, 1994, p. 191).

Community colleges are engaged in yet another cycle in the continuing debate between general education and specialization. Historically, higher education has responded to periods of increased specialization, in this case, vocationalization, with renewed emphasis on the general education curriculum. A specific example is a one-day retreat held recently by Mission College in Santa Clara, California, to discuss the balance of curriculum. Faculty, administrators, staff and students struggled with the reality that vocational courses accounted for over 40% of the curriculum, yet all agreed that it was important to ensure that matriculating students had a solid general education background. In fact, the most eloquent supporter of this notion was a student. How, then, should limited resources be allocated? What programs should grow at the expense of others in a zero-sum game?

ACCESS

> One conclusion is inescapable – the access goals of the California Master Plan for Higher Education, in today's and tomorrow's fiscal and demographic environments, are not viable given the state's current fiscal and demographic trends. . . .The research shows that there is and will continue to be an access crisis in California. (Shires, 1996, pp. xviii, xvi)

Another issue for community colleges emerged from this period, one which was related to the emphasis on vocational education: access. (63) Stark characterizes the development of

higher education as a steady long-term trend toward increased access for learners, but one which has been marked by periods when strong advocacy faltered or attention turned to other issues. Some believe Republican federal and state administrations reduced emphasis on access in 80s and 90s. Periods devoted to increasing access and modifying the curriculum were usually followed by periods which called for "quality control." Sometimes, Stark notes, these periodic emphases on quality camouflaged stereotypes and prejudices about the capabilities or efforts of nontraditional learners (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, pp. 56, 62-63).

For the most part, it is commonly believed that community colleges represent a uniquely American commitment to open access and equal opportunity. There are those, however, who charge that community colleges represent quite the opposite, that they are particularly guilty of legitimizing inequality by keeping minority students in the least prestigious types of institutions. (Brint & Karabel in Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 63).

The issue of access is a complex one. Community colleges serve all adults who are able to benefit, a loosely defined criterion that is usually applied only to federal financial aid applicants, who must establish ability to benefit via a federally approved standardized test. But there are different stages of access. Entry to the college is only one. There are access issues in respect to heavily enrolled programs, such as nursing. There are access issues connected to the transfer of students from the community college to four-year institutions. Even though students have considerable choice in selecting courses, there are hidden limitations to those choices. First, not all courses are transferable. Students who are not properly oriented to the college environment, whose academic and career goals are uncertain, or who need significant remediation may spend considerable time and other resources taking courses which will not be accepted by the four-year schools. In addition, limited articulation between two- and four-year

institutions can affect transfer. Currently, 20% of community college students transfer to four-year institutions (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 67), though the graduation rate (number of students who earn associate's degrees) and the transfer rate (number of students who transfer to four-year institutions, with or without an associate's degree) are two of the most controversial measures of community college effectiveness.

Irrespective of disagreements about how to define and measure success for community college students, one of the most disturbing effects of the community colleges is the fact that a significant percentage of the students who enter the college and indicate the ultimate goal of earning a baccalaureate degree do not achieve their goal. The questions raised by this fact bring into sharp focus the conflict between the emphasis on access and the emphasis on quality – the fundamental issue of the 1980s reform movement. Pascarella notes that there is "strong, replicated evidence that students aspiring to a bachelor's degree who begin post-secondary education at community colleges are about 15 percent less likely to complete a bachelor's degree in the same period of time as similar students who start at four-year colleges or universities" (Pascarella, February 1997, p. 15). In addition, there are studies which suggest that community college attendance results in lowered aspirations. "Controlling for important confounding influences such as precollege aspirations and academic ability, community college students initially aspiring to a bachelor's degree were about 30 percent more likely than similar four-year college students to lower their degree aspirations below a bachelor's degree by the end of the second year of college" (Pascarella, February 1997, p. 15). Dougherty asks whether this effect is intentional but concludes that it is the inadvertent result of an institution which "tries to serve many different and often contradictory goals on the part not only of private interest groups but also of a host of government officials" (Dougherty, 1994, p. 186). Pascarella also observes that

in spite of the negative impact on transfer, evidence suggests and this effect "does not necessarily translate into future occupational or economic advantages." Nor do community college students appear to lag behind their four-year counterparts. Standardized tests used to measure intellectual skills and capabilities acquired during the first two years of an undergraduate education show no statistically significant differences between the two groups. Other studies show that community college students tend to make significantly larger first–year gains in "internal locus of attribution for academic success or failure" than their four-year counterparts. While the supporting evidence is "modest" according to Pascarella, it does suggest that any negative impact of attending a community college vs. a four-year school may be mitigated over time (Pascarella, February 1997, p. 16).

Clearly, issues of access and success are complex ones for community colleges, which do not select their students and whose mission is to respond to the needs of their communities, no matter how diverse the communities or the needs. However, this reality is often lost on the general public and business, who are not always cognizant of the differences between community colleges and four-year institutions. The impression is still strong that community colleges are, or should be, "junior" colleges, that is, with the first two years of study leading to a baccalaureate degree.

ACCOUNTABILITY

> The overarching problem is that the North American public's love affair with its institutions of higher education has come to an end; at the very least, the friendship has cooled. And, it is clear that community colleges, in particular, are at the most critical juncture of their lives. . . .At this juncture, they can either cling, with tremendous peril, to self-absorbed beliefs that they are doing all they can, as well as they can, to serve their students and communities, and need not respond with enthusiasm to these challenges; or they can embrace the current press for comprehensive assessment and evaluation of their efforts with clarity of focus and documentable fervor. (Roueche, Johnson, and Roueche, 1997, p. 4)

As previously mentioned, fear of decreased quality has followed most periods of increased diversity. Since the 1980s, parents and business people have questioned the success of community colleges, just as they have questioned the value of a college degree in a rapidly changing job market or the success of the public school system. For example, there is much conflicting data on high school preparation, but whatever the correct interpretation, in 1989, 90% of two-year public colleges and 64% of four-year public colleges offered remedial courses, most for credit (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, pp. 74, 78). The third issue facing community colleges is accountability, just as it is an issue for the secondary systems and other segments of higher education. As Stark observes, society has always emphasized accountability to some degree and in some manner, whether to justify funding or to assert quality control as a means of slowing and refocusing curricular change, that is to "correct" the course of the colleges (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, pp. 73-74).

Sources of demand for quality control mechanisms are varied. They include educators, society, and students, but most frequently they are those who provide funding to higher education: state and federal governments and to a lesser extent, private foundations and businesses (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 73). In spite of longstanding expectations of accountability, higher education's mechanisms for evaluation and adjustment have remained "idiosyncratic and unsystematic" (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 45).

> Although the public has increasingly sought quality control, colleges have only begun to develop procedures for evaluating whether the academic plans they devise full support excellence. Thus, the debate about quality control and accountability shows no sign of abating." (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 78)

For California community colleges in the 1990s, the demand for accountability from so many external sources has resulted in an attempt to become more systematic about measuring effectiveness. In *Embracing the Tiger: The Effectiveness Debate and the Community College*,

Roueche, Johnson and Roueche (1997) note that community colleges are more exposed than the four-year, "ivy-covered" institutions. They are even less able than four-year colleges and universities to ascribe the problem to poor public relations. The call for accountability has drawn a line in the sand with higher education on one side and the public on the other (Roueche, 1997, pp. 4-5).

In the 1980s, there were three major community college reform efforts in California. One occurred with the system-wide requirement to tighten academic standards for degree-applicable courses in order to ensure their rigor, especially in the area of critical thinking. The second was the result of the passage of Assembly Bill 1725, a major piece of legislation which made fundamental changes in community college governance. The third reform was Assembly Bill 3, which mandated the matriculation process, designed to ensure access and improve the success of community college students. One component of the matriculation legislation in particular has significance for this discussion. Matriculation required that colleges establish research functions to evaluate student progress and to validate assessment instruments used for placement. It was an important change because it would give the community colleges the foundation upon which to build future attempts to measure institutional effectiveness. Unfortunately, the progress of 107 community colleges proved to be uneven and was exacerbated by similar problems at the state level of management information systems. It would not be until the late 1990s that there would be agreement on the key indicators, such as the transfer rate, and the formulas by which they would be measured.

Another factor in the accountability movement among higher education was the quality movement. Total Quality Management (TQM) and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) were management approaches and organizational paradigms adopted by businesses in reaction to

increasing international competition, especially from Japan. As O'Banion notes, "Japan began to produce the quality of products the world wanted while the United States remained devoted to producing the quantity the world had needed" (O'Banion, 1997, p. 97). Just as education had adopted the "cult of efficiency" or the factory model from the business world in the early 1900s, so did education eventually begin to adopt the concepts of TQM. Community colleges embraced the movement, forming The Continuous Quality Improvement Network, a group of community colleges which led the transformation. However, the transformation has been of limited impact, notes O'Banion. It has had more effect on management structures within the colleges and little effect on the learning process (O'Banion, 1997, p. 98). The adoption of business concepts and terminology has not been widely embraced by faculty, especially the concept of student as customer. Community college faculty perceive the learning process to be something more than a business transaction. For this reason and because many colleges only partially understood the concepts of TQM and only partially implemented it, the TQM movement has not changed fundamental practices and beliefs in spite of the many similarities between TQM and learning organizations, according to O'Banion (1997). However, the TQM movement may have reinforced the expectation that colleges engage in a continuous process of evaluation and adjustment.

Accreditation is another critical driver in community college reform, especially in respect to accountability. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools was a pioneer in establishing the expectation that colleges would have in place the systems necessary to demonstrate institutional effectiveness. In 1997, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) implemented new accreditation standards. The main change that appeared throughout every standard was the requirement that colleges not only have the systems in place

to measure institutional effectiveness, but that those systems actually generate data which is used to improve programs and services. Thus, assessment and evaluation have become the cornerstones of institutional planning efforts. One result of the push toward accountability is a re-examination of the infrastructure of the community college system since many educators, O'Banion (1997) for example, stress that no meaningful improvement in student outcomes and institutional effectiveness can occur without significant changes in the system itself.

SYSTEMIC CHANGES

> The primary problem of education reform triggered by *A Nation a Risk* is that solutions have been proposed as add-ons or modifications to the current system of education. . . . Fixing what is broken by repairing the pieces or grafting on a prosthetic technology will not address core issues. "The reform movement of the past decade has been trimming the branches of a dying tree." (O'Banion in O'Banion, 1997, p. 7)

There are two main areas which are most often discussed as needing substantive change if California community colleges are to provide present and future students with access to a quality education: (1) funding and (2) governance and administration. There is a considerable sense of urgency about this discussion as California prepares for Tidal Wave II, a projected surge in student demand that will sorely tax the capacity and capability of the state's system of higher education.

FUNDING

In his study, *The Future of Public Undergraduate Education in California*, Shires (1996) describes a crisis of access which faces the state. He notes that current policies, reflecting recessionary budget practices, have resulted in an 11 percent decrease in the overall level of service. That rate translates into more than 200,000 students who would have attended college but could not because budget cuts had both reduced the number and type of classes and

increased tuition and fees. Further, Shires projects that increases in the student population and continued declining resources "will leave more than one million students unserved in 2010-11" (Shires, 1996, pp. xv-xvi). Shires concludes that the state must do two things: (1) increase its investment in higher education and (2) revise the state Master Plan for Higher Education, now 38 years old. Colleges themselves have an obligation to increase their efficiency and make better use of limited resources. In fact, funding for community colleges has shown marked improvement in the last two years as property tax revenues have met or exceeded state projections. However, for many colleges, it is a question of restoring, not expanding, programs and services that were eliminated or reduced in the budget cuts that characterized the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The California community college system created a task force to recommend actions for that segment of higher education between now and the year 2005. Called the *2005 Task Force Report*, it is a compilation of studies done by such agencies as the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) and RAND. Major points of the report were summarized in the *Senate Rostrum*, the newsletter of the Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges (January 1998). They can be grouped into several categories:

ACCESS: The California community college system will be heavily impacted by a projected surge in enrollments between now and 2005.

- CPEC estimates that 78% of the increased enrollments in state higher education will occur at the community college level. In raw numbers, Tidal Wave II estimates are that an additional 400,000 students will attend community colleges by the year 2005.

- Population projections combined with participation rates suggest that there will be increased polarization among some ethnic minority groups, creating greater social and economic gaps among California's citizenry.
- The community college participation rate of African-American males was cut in half between 1977 and 1995 and the rate for African-American females dropped by nearly one-third.
- The continued low participation rates of Hispanic students must be addressed.
- Immigrants comprise 20% of California's population but will account for nearly 50% of the growth between now and 2005. Overall, there will be a greater need for ESL and basic skills.
- The California State University system (CSU) has adopted a policy to reduce its remediation function, thus directing more underprepared students to the community colleges.

WORKPLACE PREPARATION: Among the segments of higher education, California Community Colleges are and will continue to be the principal providers of workforce training.

- The real earnings of workers with only a high school education will be about 40% less in 2015 than they were in 1976.
- Of all segments of higher education, the community colleges are the principal players in helping welfare recipients transition to the workplace.
- In 1996, legislation was passed adding economic development to the mission statement for community colleges. Community colleges must proactively seek ways to partner with business and industry.

COST: The California Community College system has been and continues to be underfunded when compared to other segments of higher education within the state and when compared to the national average.

- The cost of NOT addressing the educational and training needs of the state must be considered along with long-term needs. These costs include welfare, unemployment and incarceration. From 1975 to 1995, as community college participation rates decreased from 88 to 58 per 1,000 adults, the incarceration rate increased from 92 to 392 per 100,000 adults. The cost to educate one community college student is $3,500 per year; the cost to incarcerate one individual is $23,500 per year.
- The community college system has long been underfunded compared to K-12, UC and CSU. Community colleges would have needed to receive an additional $800 million in 1995 to equal the smallest of the cumulative increases in the other segments.
- California spends less that the national average on community colleges. In 1994, California spent $3,554 per student while the national average was $6,022.

What are the solutions proposed by the report? Primarily, they have to do with developing revenue alternatives and include:

- Institutionalize the Proposition 98 split, which balances funding between K-12 and community colleges.
- Change laws governing local bond elections to allow for passage by a majority vote, instead of two-thirds. Further, allow funds to be used to equip buildings as well as construct them.
- Control increases in student fees.
- Increase public-private partnerships
- Maximize federal revenue.
- Revise existing tax laws to provide for tax increases and funding for all levels of public education.

Additionally, California Community Colleges would benefit from a more realistic and stable funding formula and a master plan that would give colleges more direction in terms of how much growth will be supported by the state.

Access, however, is not the only issue for the state's community college system. Student success is another. The community colleges are no longer able to dodge the accountability bullet as the nation's higher education system has done in the past. If the government and private sources are to invest more funds into the community college system, the expectation is that the colleges will be able to demonstrate that those funds have been well spent and that they are matriculating students who possess the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully pursue more education or enter the workplace. For too long, colleges have believed that the public's lack of understanding and/or appreciation for their role has been the result of poor public relations (Roueche, Johnson and Roueche, 1997, p. 5). However, the reality is that the public is asking serious question of higher education, the same kinds of questions they have long asked of the K-12 system. Most colleges, indeed the entire system, are not able to provide consistent and comparable data. No one could successfully argue that the problems of the K-12 system were merely the result of faulty public relations and no one will be able to do so in terms of the community colleges.

The Chancellor of the Community College system, Tom Nussbaum, has proposed that the system move to a performance based funding model which has been implemented in some other states, notably Florida. Performance based funding has strong political appeal for the public and the legislature because it is based on the premise that funding will flow to those colleges who can best demonstrate that they are successful in preparing students to achieve their academic and career goals. It is also a powerful negotiating tool as Nussbaum prepares to

request a $500 million budget increase for the system. Nussbaum has initiated this concept by proposing that $100 million be set aside for "academic excellence," i.e., how well colleges do in graduating or transferring students. The Board of Governors approved the concept but not the money. Predictably, the colleges criticized the proposal, fearing that suburban districts would benefit over urban districts which tend to serve the poorest and most underprepared students and that instructors would be encouraged to inflate grades to obtain more funding (Archibold, 1997, p. 13). Another real concern is just how academic excellence would be defined and measured. With the guidance of a statewide research and planning group, the system has only recently reached consensus on effectiveness indicators for student success. However, colleges are at very different stages in their abilities to collect and analyze data beyond what is now reported to the state's management information system. While it is not yet clear how Nussbaum's proposal will fare, it is safe to say that the issue of linking funding to outcomes will not go away.

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

> "Leaders of California's 2-Year College System Say Governance Structure Is at a Breaking Point," (headline for an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 19, 1997, p. A33)

Revenue is not the only issue with which community colleges must grapple. It must also confront the systemic issue of how resources – money, time, equipment, facilities, personnel – are allocated. Ultimately, it is a question of how colleges establish priorities, how they make short- and long-term decisions that support their mission and their goals and result in student success. American higher education has always been a decentralized system and the community college system in California reflects that tradition. One hundred seven colleges are grouped into 71 districts, each run by locally elected boards with wide latitude in setting curriculum and

policies (Archibold, 1997, p. 13). The 16-member Board of Governors sets broad policy and advise local districts on policy questions. The Chancellor's Office primarily distributes guaranteed state funding, monitors colleges' and districts' financial situations, and monitors college's compliance with legislated mandates such as matriculation. There is nothing in the education code which permits the Chancellor's Office to intervene or overrule a local board's decision. It is this structure which has led critics such as William H. Pickens, Executive Director of California Citizens Commission on Higher Education, to complain that the California community college system

> is a set of institutions enormously consumed by internal issues and conflicts and turf battles that are barren of an educational result. . . . I like contentiousness and argument and discussion. But when one's entire energy is devoted to that and there is no benefit to the students, you have to say, 'We need to change the structure.' (Archibold, 1997, p. 13)

It is likely that the issue of more centralization will continue, especially as the system competes for limited resources in the face of Tidal Wave II. A major challenge will be to balance the principle of local autonomy with the political need to present a united front to the state legislature. Within the system, however, there remains yet another issue: shared governance.

With the passage of AB 1725 in the 1980s, one of the key pieces of community college reform, shared governance became the mandated method by which community colleges would make decisions. The roles of key constituencies – faculty, administration, and students – were defined. Although a careful reading of the legislation reveals that local boards continue to retain all final decision making authority, they must nevertheless agree, for example, to recognize the primary authority of the academic senate in matters of curriculum and give due consideration to the senate's recommendations.

Implementation of AB 1725 has not been smooth. As colleges re-examined their governance structures in a time of dwindling resources and budget cutbacks, previously unresolved and new issues of power and control surfaced. The situation was further complicated by the fact that most community colleges have collective bargaining. Whether and how unions participate in shared governance became a thorny issue. Hammering out local shared governance agreements became an end unto itself rather than a tool for decision making. Perhaps most frustrating for colleges caught in white water change is the fact that shared governance is a time-consuming process. While nearly everyone agrees that decision making is better for having adequate and appropriate input and the ultimate buy-in of the college community, few would disagree that the process is often cumbersome and inefficient. Community colleges are under increasing pressure to respond quickly to changes that can have significant impact on their mission if not their survival. A survey of articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* conveys the enormity of some of these changes: "Arizona Considers Landmark Plan to Allow Community Colleges to Offer Baccalaureate Degrees (January 16, 1998), "Colorado Community Colleges Plan Degree to Be Offered Entirely Over the Internet (November 28, 1997), "For-Profit Higher Education Sees Booming Enrollments and Revenues (January 23, 1998), "Higher-Education Systems as Cartels: The End is Near," (October 1, 1997), "Rethinking the Role of the Professor in an Age of High-Tech Tools," (October 3, 1997).

The most recent example of the impact of shared governance can be found in the 9-college Los Angeles Community College District, a huge and troubled system that has been on the state's financial "watch list" since 1987. After one year as chancellor of the district, Bill Segura resigned, citing the governance structure of both the district and the state as the reason. "Like many of his colleagues statewide, Dr. Segura blames a state law that directs administrators

to consult with constituencies on academic and professional matters. The district has seven unions, a system-wide academic senate, senates on each campus, and other advisory groups – most of which want a voice in decisions" (Healy, 1997, p. A33). Also included in the mix is the District's elected board of trustees, student senates and classified senates.

What makes the issues of governance and structure so critical is that increasingly, educators are calling not for improvements to the system but entire new systems, such as learning organizations, that will result not just in more efficient internal processes but will actually produce better student outcomes. Again, the link to accountability is clear and is powerfully expressed in such landmark books as O'Banion's *A Learning College for the 21st Century*, Roueche, Johnson and Roueche's *Embracing the Tiger*, and Dougherty's *The Contradictory College*. Anything less than radical change is, as O'Banion puts it, "trimming the branches of a dying tree" (O'Banion in O'Banion, 1997, p. 7)

In summary, California's community colleges are indeed at a critical juncture. While sustaining their current mission and meeting the needs of one of the nation's largest and most diverse populations in a state with an economy that ranks among the largest in the world, community colleges must set new long-term goals and marshal limited resources to meet them. To be successful, they must rethink the most fundamental elements of the system. Perhaps the greatest challenge, one not addressed in this paper, is the need for the leadership that will guide colleges in this task.

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